

Summary of the Alternatives for Draft Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan (HMS FMP)

Comments will be accepted through October 18, 2005 and may be submitted via FAX (301-427-2592), email (SF1.060303D@noaa.gov), or mail to HMS Mgmt Division (F/SF1), NMFS/NOAA, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. For further information, contact Karyl Brewster-Geisz, Heather Stirratt, or Margo Schulze-Haugen at (301) 713-2347; Russ Dunn at (727) 824-5399; or Mark Murray-Brown at (978) 281-9260.

Issue	Preferred Alternative(s)	Range of Alternatives (all include NO ACTION)
Workshops - Handling and release workshops are required by the October 2003 and June 2004 Biological Opinions - Species identification is needed to improve shark data, assessments, and management	- Handling/release workshops: mandatory workshops for pelagic longline, bottom longline, and shark gillnet owners and operators; 3 year certification; grandfather pelagic longline industry certifications - Species identification workshops: mandatory for shark dealers (permit holder or proxy); 3 year certification	- Handling/release: voluntary for longline fishermen; mandatory for pelagic/bottom longline owner, operator, crew - Species identification: voluntary for dealers, owners, operators, and recreational fishermen; mandatory for all HMS dealers; mandatory for longline vessel owners and/or operators; mandatory for all commercial permit holders and/or operators (shark, all tuna, swordfish); mandatory for all HMS Angling permit holders
Time/Area closures - Closures are currently in place to reduce bycatch in pelagic longline and shark bottom longline fisheries - Bycatch continues to be a concern in HMS fisheries - Time/area closures are one management tool to address bycatch; adjustments may be needed as fisheries and/or issues change - Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council requested complementary HMS regulations - Settlement agreement pending in white marlin litigation - Petition for Rulemaking to close area in the Gulf of Mexico to pelagic longline fishing submitted in 2005	- Establish criteria to consider when implementing new time/area closures or making modifications to existing time/area closures - Implement complementary HMS management measures in Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps Marine Reserves (area closures) consistent with Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council regulations	- Several different closures for white and blue marlin, sea turtles, and bluefin tuna - Closure for sawfish for bottom longline fishery - Several different modifications for existing areas - open areas seaward of Gulf Stream in Florida East Coast and Charleston Bump closures, and deepwater areas of DeSoto Canyon - Prohibit the use of pelagic longline gear in HMS fisheries - Closure in Gulf of Mexico for white marlin, sea turtles, bluefin tuna in conjunction with modifying existing time/area closures - Closure in Gulf of Mexico per Petition for Rulemaking
Northern albacore tuna - Stock is overfished - United States is a minor harvester - ICCAT does not have a rebuilding plan in place	- Establish the foundation with International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) for developing an international rebuilding program	- Unilateral proportional reduction of U.S. fishing mortality
Finetooth sharks - Overfishing is occurring - Species is primarily caught in gillnets in non-HMS fisheries	- Identify sources of finetooth shark mortality to target appropriate management actions, including increase observer coverage and work with Councils/ Commissions to improve data collection	- Implement commercial management measures, including trip limit, gear restrictions, directed gillnet fishery closure, small coastal shark quota reduction - Implement recreational management measures including circle hook requirement, minimum size increase - Prohibit landings

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Billfish - Blue and white marlin are overfished and overfishing is occurring - 250-limit for recreational landings of blue and white marlin combined per year is required by an ICCAT recommendation - Species was petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act; status review is scheduled for 2007	- Circle hooks mandatory for billfish tournaments, effective 2007, with natural baits and natural bait-artificial lure combinations - Prohibit landings/Catch-and-release only fishing for white marlin, effective 2007-2011 - Implement ICCAT limit (e.g., 250-marlin per year limit on landings)	- Circle hooks for all Angling category fishermen - Increase minimum size for white and/or blue marlin - Establish bag limit - Prohibit landings/Catch-and-release only fishing for blue marlin, effective 2007-2011 - Implement mandatory HMS tournament permit
Bluefin tuna - Management has become increasingly complicated, difficult for the public to understand, and may no longer reflect the needs of the fishery - Petition for Rulemaking for General category winter fishery submitted in 2002	- Adjust General category time-period/subquotas to allow for winter fishery, remove geographic set-asides - Allow General category time-period/ subquota management via framework regulatory adjustments - Conducting full quota specifications only when ICCAT quota changes; annually account for quota underages/ overages and establish General & Angling category seasons via framework rules; cap quota rollover amount at 100% of baseline allocation, except for Reserve category - Remove Angling North/South line - Revise and consolidate criteria analyzed for all inseason actions	- General category time-periods: equal quota shares for each month, several different time-period and subquota adjustments - Conduct full quota specifications process annually - Eliminate quota rollovers - Eliminate inseason actions
Timeframe for annual management - Data collections occur on a calendar year basis and do not match the current fishing year	- Convert fishing year to calendar year for tunas, swordfish, and billfish fisheries	- Convert to June 1 fishing year for all species
Authorized fishing gears - Current definitions do not reflect recent practices	- Authorize speargun as permissible gear in recreational tuna fishery with no sale except for charter/head boats on for-hire trips; no sale of bluefin tuna - Authorize commercial greenstick gear for bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack tunas - Authorize buoy gear in commercial swordfish fishery (re-defines existing handline definition- see Regulatory Housekeeping), limit number of buoys to 35 with no more than 2 hooks or gangions attached; require reflectors - Clarify allowance of secondary cockpit gears	- Authorize speargun as permissible gear in recreational and commercial tuna fisheries - Authorize buoy gear in commercial swordfish fishery, limit number of buoys to 50 with up to 15 hooks or gangions attached

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Regulatory housekeeping - Current regulations include outdated and incorrect cross-references and need minor changes/revisions - Further clarification of certain provisions of current regulations warranted	- Require recreational vessels with Federal permit to abide by Federal regulations, regardless of where fishing, unless a state has more restrictive regulations - Prohibit possession of billfish on all vessels issued HMS commercial permits - Define pelagic and bottom longline gears based on a maximum and minimum number of floats and indicator species - Require handlines to be attached to vessel (recreational and commercial) - Require 2 nd dorsal fin and anal fin be maintained on all sharks through landing - Prohibit purchase and sale of HMS in excess of retention limits - Amend coordinates of East Coast closed area to correspond with boundary of EEZ (extend by 0.55 nm) - Limit number of handlines allowed per vessel, possibly dependent on permit type - Allow for bluefin tuna dealer reports via the internet - Require no fishing and trip cost-earnings reports - Clarify vessel owners, not anglers, must report recreational non-tournament landings of billfish and swordfish - Modify regulations to allow rollover of annual Northeast Distant 25 mt allocation of bluefin tuna - 44 other technical items proposed	- Define pelagic and bottom longline gears based on species composition, floats, weights, and/or data loggers; base time/area closures on all longlines - Require 2 nd dorsal fin and anal fin be maintained on all sharks, except lemon and nurse sharks, through landing; require all fins remain on all sharks through landing - Require handlines be attached to recreational vessels only - Require bluefin tuna dealer reports via the internet - Conduct additional discussions at ICCAT on Northeast Distant quota

Other Issues:

1. Draft Consolidated HMS FMP: The two current FMPs (Billfish FMP and FMP for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish, and Sharks) are consolidated in the draft FMP. Based on public comment on the Predraft, two objectives from the Billfish FMP are now proposed to maintained and the combined HMS/Billfish Advisory Panel seats will be maintained.
2. Removal of no sale exemption for billfish from original 1988 Billfish FMP: This provision would have allowed 100 billfish to be sold annually in the Caribbean if the Caribbean Fishery Management Council implemented several provisions. The Caribbean Council has not implemented those provisions and requested removal of the exemption. Other involved Councils and public comment support removal of the exemption.
3. Withdrawl of a previously issued 250-marlin proposed rule: The draft Consolidated HMS FMP and proposed rule update and re-propose the measures previously considered.
4. Presenting data for 5-year review of essential fish habitat: Changes to EFH, if needed, will be considered in a separate rulemaking/document